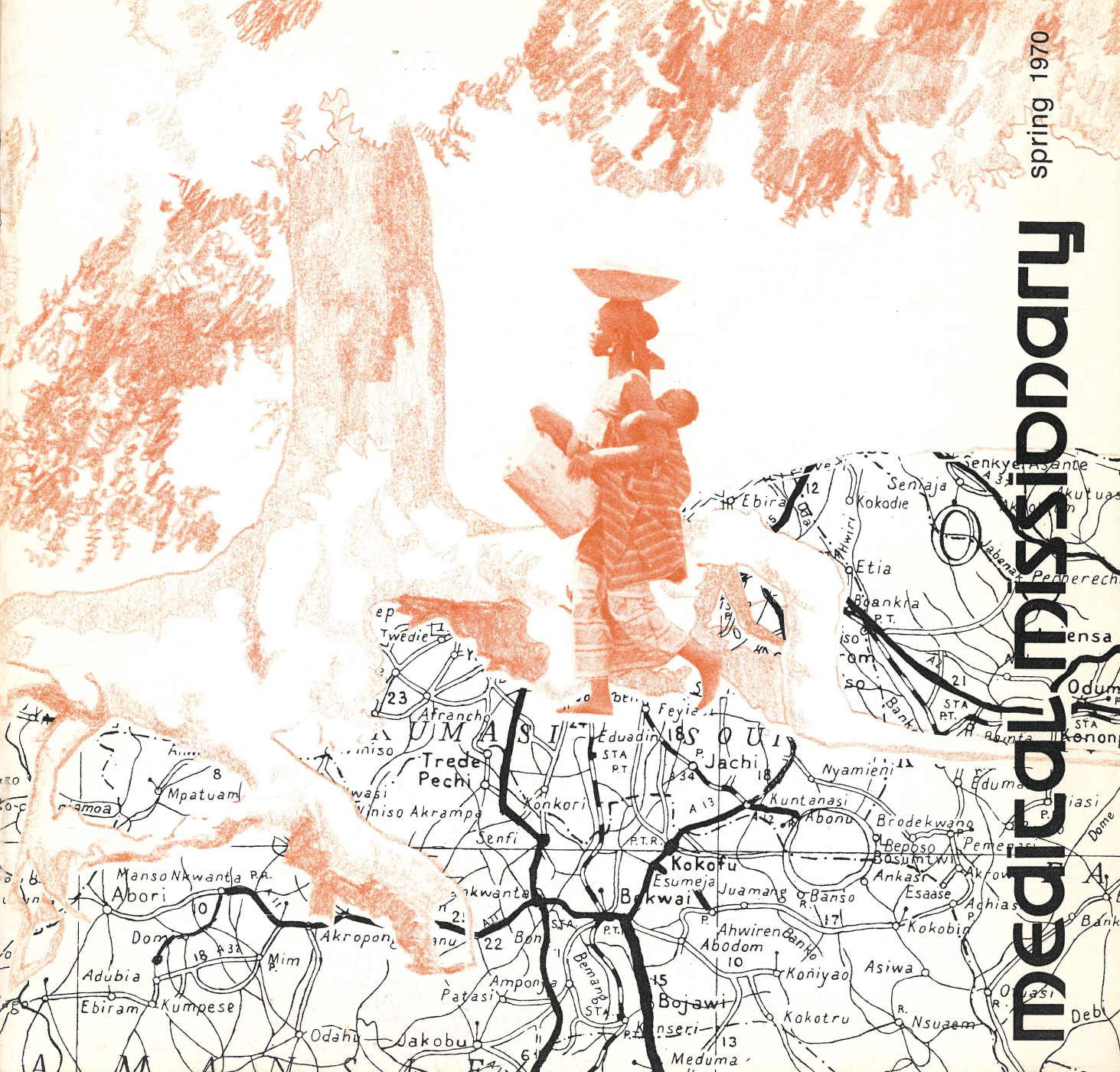


spring 1970

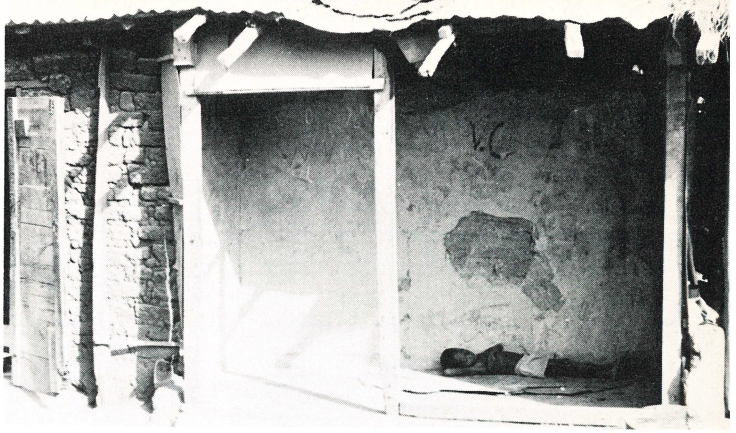
mediaculture

an artist goes to ghana: excerpts from the diary of sister victoria connelly

KENNEDY INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

april 1, 1969

I'm sitting here in this international port of departure and entry, surrounded by people, yet still very much alone. Beautiful people, some beautiful facades, beautiful smiles . . . white mink, white poodles, bags and babies (some people carry them the same), distant, friendly, but all together—travelers, pilgrims. The paging system never quits: "Mrs. Annalee Pilata," (I will never know you, but we are travelers all) "kindly contact your ticket agent." I am all adventure! A pilgrim artist off to Ghana, seeking—what? Perhaps, just perhaps, myself. . . .



april 2

"Welcome to Ghana, may your stay with us be happy."

Thus far, I have hit three cities: Dakar (Senegal), Accra and now, Kumasi. The village of Berekum lies ahead. The ride from Kumasi to Holy Family Hospital, Berekum, is breathtaking—paved but deeply rutted roads spotted at frequent intervals by roadside villages and small markets. Many lorries packed full of people traveling for a penny-a-mile comprise most of the traffic. The road signs like "vertical hill and valley" are most original, as are the inscriptions on the lorries themselves: PEOPLE WILL TALK, INTO THY HANDS, EVEN THE BIRDS. I saw two lorries parked side by side. One inscription read, GOD NEVER SLEEPS. The other, WHO KNOWS?

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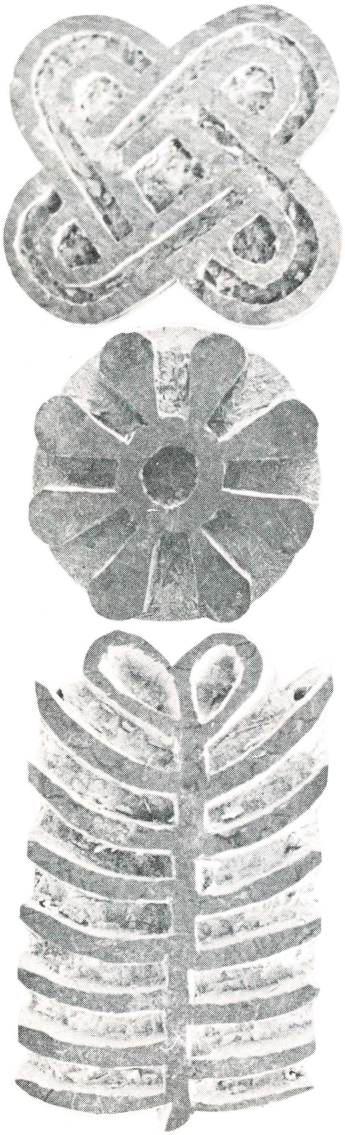


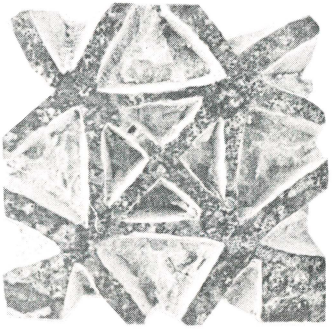
april 4

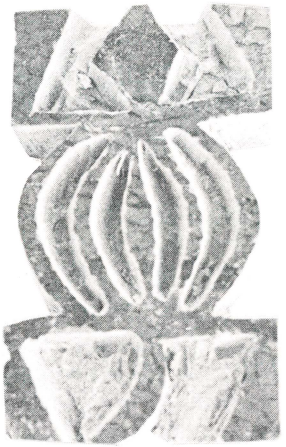
The hospital is quiet today. All are in mourning colors—saffron, orange, yellow—drinking palm wine just as they would for the funeral of one of their own. Good Friday ceremonies began with Stations of the Cross along Berekum's main street. Funerals to the Ghanaians are very special times and all participate.

One little boy tried so hard to get acquainted. He stayed by my side for the longest time before finally taking hold of my hand. One of our Sisters had given me a small piece of cardboard to kneel on. At about Station VII, he picked it up and carried it, placing it on the ground for me at each stop. By Station XIV, we were sharing the cardboard. It is so nice to be adopted in a strange land!

The long reading of the Passion was done in Twi by three of the churchmen. Talk about audience participation! Very open signs of displeasure or laughter, depending on the passage.

I went to bed with the sound of gunshots ringing in my ears—a customary salute to the dead. Later, I copied down some of the symbols I saw on the funeral cloths of the people. They are uniquely stamped Adinkira cloth. Ashantis, it is said, were inspired by the Muslims who had words from the Koran stamped on some of their cloth. The dye (very black) is made from the bark of the "bodie" tree, and the stamps are made from pieces of old calabash. The cloths may be black on green, yellow, red or blue. There are various patterns of braiding that I noticed. I must investigate them. Tomorrow I will take out my camera for the first time. There is so much to see with my plain eye first!





NSOROMA — *"a child of the sky" (a star). Like the star, the child of the Supreme Being. I rest with God and do not depend on myself.*

HYE WO NHYE — *"He would burn you, be not burned." This pattern was on the pillow of the kings of Ashanti.*

NYAME BIRIBI WO SORO MA NO ME KA NSA — *"O God, everything which is above, permit my hand to touch it." This design hung over a door in the palace of the Kings of Ashanti. The King touched it, then his forehead, then his breast, repeating the words three times.*

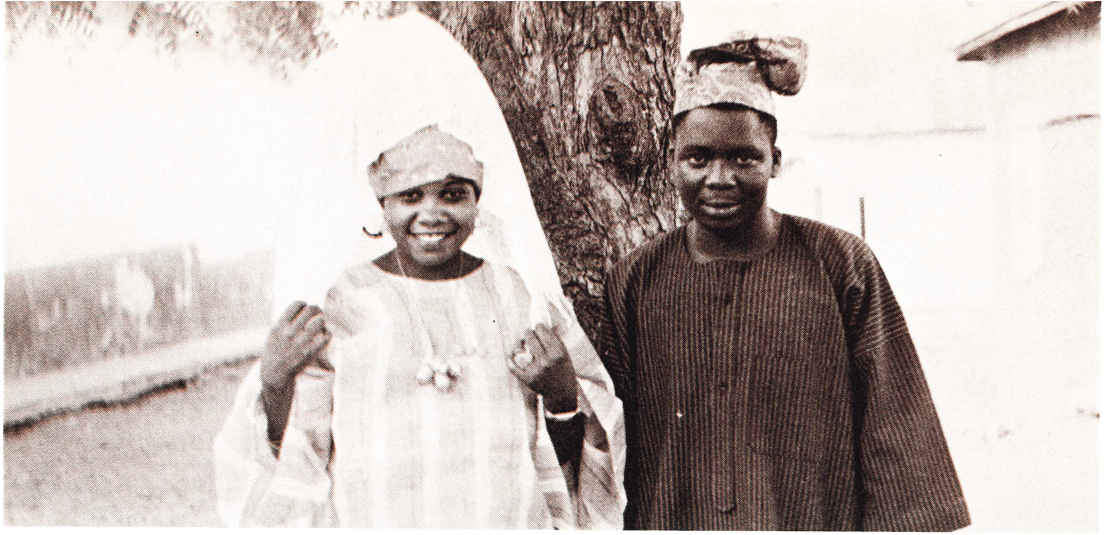
GYE NYAME — *"I fear none except God."*

DWENINI ABEN — *"The ram's horns."*

ADINKIRAHENE — *"King of all designs."*

NSORAN — *"Sorrow Lament."*

OHENE NIWA — *"In the King's little eyes" (in his favor).*



april 12

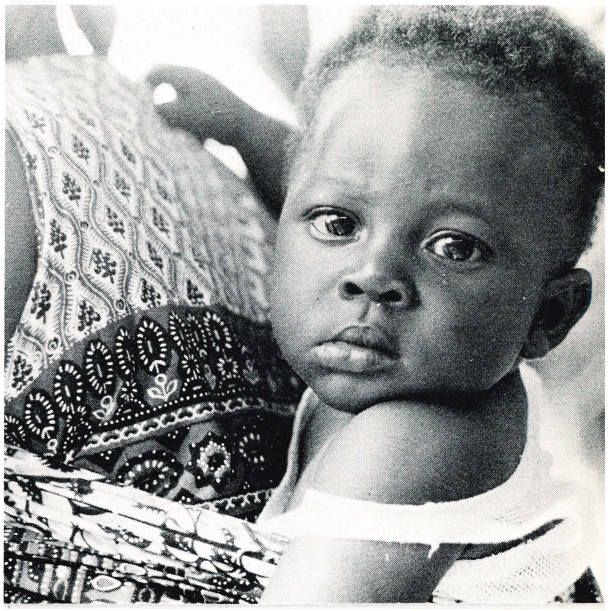
This afternoon was a wonderful experience. Several of the Sisters and I went to Wamfie for the wedding celebration of one of our operating room technicians whose new bride had come from Nigeria.

The groom's father goes to the village to "steal" the bride—all this has been prearranged—and spirits her back to the groom's village where she remains in seclusion while the groom, his family and friends celebrate for nine days. At the end of that time, the groom's father again goes to the bride's family, this time with suitable gifts, says that the family is pleased with the bride, and asks if she may stay. All of this has been preceded by the groom's sending the bride all sorts of engagement gifts as a kind of courtship rite. The bride may come out of seclusion only upon invitation.

When we arrived, we were greeted first by some of the Lagosian women, then by the groom Stephan's parents. We were taken to the inner compound and seated in a small room where we were formally greeted by the elders of the village and by Stephan's relatives. Soon, the bride herself came to greet us. She was dressed in blue and white with much gold jewelry. She was very shy and very beautiful. Before giving the wedding gift, we each had to give "advices" to the young couple. (Luckily, we had a translator!) Finally, we "begged the road" after sharing in that wonderful graciousness which invites the stranger as friend.

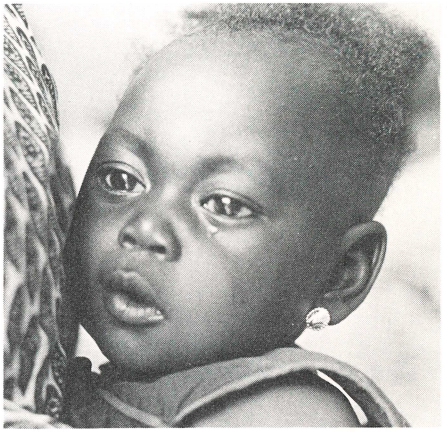
april 15

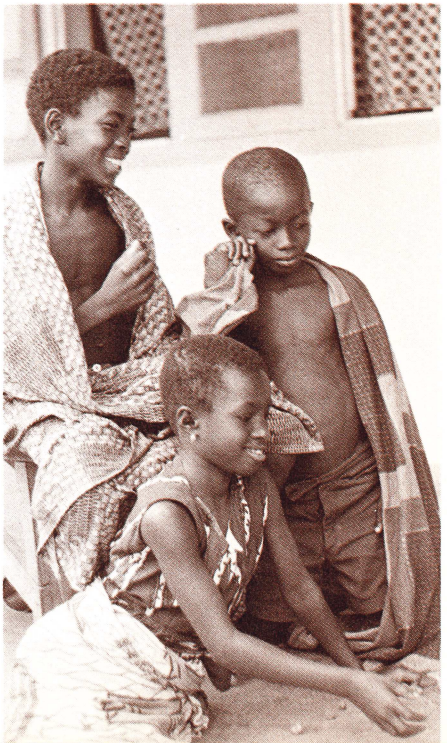
Today, morning rounds with Doctor Wynen, then in the afternoon, a special measles clinic. What a mad rush! There were young children bringing babies for whom they only knew the first name. Babies, babies, and more babies. It took 6′1″ Sister Isabelle, her equally good-sized helper Alex, and one aide to keep the mothers and the babies back. Every mother wanted me to "cut a photo" of her little one—and they were so dressed up! Sister Isabelle would let them in six-at-a-time. The needle squadron would do their stuff. Then Alex would let them out six-at-a-time, crying buckets of tears.



april 25

Spent most of the day in Maternity with Sister Joan. A really beautiful *mamyi* who had already borne eight children was in very low labor, and suspected to be carrying twins. For about two hours, we checked on her and kept her company. Finally, at noon, the first little one, a boy, emerged. Then, five minutes later, a girl. I was able to do small things to help, and it was good. We called in the Papa, who looked quite dashing, dressed in Ghanaian cloth with a felt hat. He shook hands all around, all the while thanking God. Twins are considered very good luck here. "My" twins were named Atta Kofi Panyen and Ataa Afia Kuma. The children are delightful! Many of the small ones have such strong personalities! I remember one little girl in particular. We were in the village of Kato for a well-baby clinic. Immunization shots were given to the children, and the mothers received free powdered milk, rice, corn flour. One darling three-year-old, after enduring her injection with wide, but tearless eyes, went up to the rover driver who was giving out the food, took off her little cloth, and self-assuredly said, "Rice, please." She then proceeded to wrap the rice up in her cloth, put it on her head, and walked away, clad only in her little waist-beads. Smiling from ear to ear!



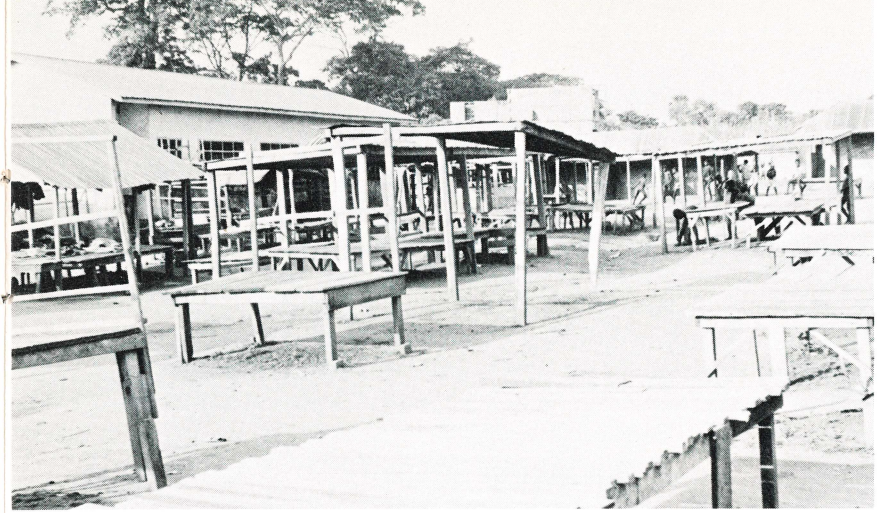


may 1

Arrived in Techiman this morning and had a tour of the hospital from Sister Joanne Barton, the administrator. Holy Family Hospital, Techiman, is small—35 beds as compared with Berekum's 100—and situated right in the center of town. Techiman is one of the biggest market towns in Ghana and, because of this, many people from the North come to settle here. I am anxious to see the market which begins quite early in the morning and lasts until sunset. . . .

may 9

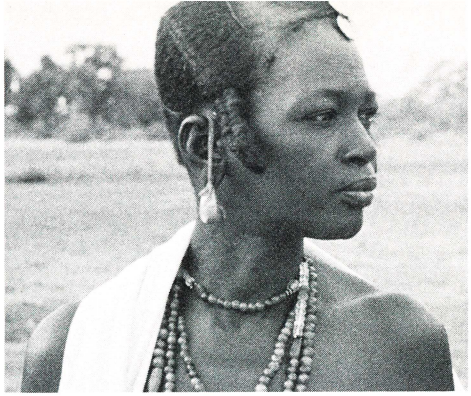
Market Day! Lorries began pouring into Techiman from the North and the Coast on Thursday night. The big business usually gets done on Thursday night so that the big loads of yams and plantain can begin their journey the next day. Fresh fish is brought from the Coast; cloth, from Tema, and sugar cane which grows along the Coast as well. More dried fish comes down from the North along with huge basins of shea butter made from animal fat. Suddenly, the whole flavor of the population changes. Chances are, you will see a tall man with flowing white full-length shirt all wrapped around turban-style, like someone out of the "Arabian Nights." Standing beside him will be another tribesman from the North, dressed only in a loincloth. And next to *him,* a white-shirted business man with "darks" (dark glasses), from Kumasi or Accra. We spent a good half-day at the market amid sights, sounds and smells that cannot be imagined. Every day is a happening here and one must be prepared for anything, and any combination of events.

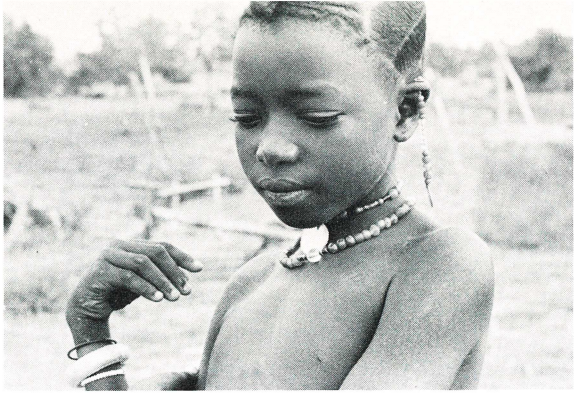


may 15

This morning I spent with Afia, a little girl born prematurely here, whose mother died of hepatitis. The father has little interest in her, so soon she will be sent to an orphanage in the North. The aides in the hospital have "adopted" her, and they take turns carting her around on their backs as they go about their lighter duties. They have pierced her ears so that she is a "proper girl" and have made a small wardrobe for her. Despite everything, Afia is getting a pretty good start in life.

This afternoon, we took off for Wenchi for, of all things, a baby show. It was not the kind of baby show we have back home, but rather a recent innovation here to encourage mothers in the villages to bring their babies to the newly established well-baby clinics. It is not unusual to find a mother with nine births and only two living children. It is not neglect which causes infant deaths. Ignorance is one reason; diseases for which cures have usually been inaccessible, is another. Slowly, so slowly, they are beginning to come to the clinic, and the results are encouraging.

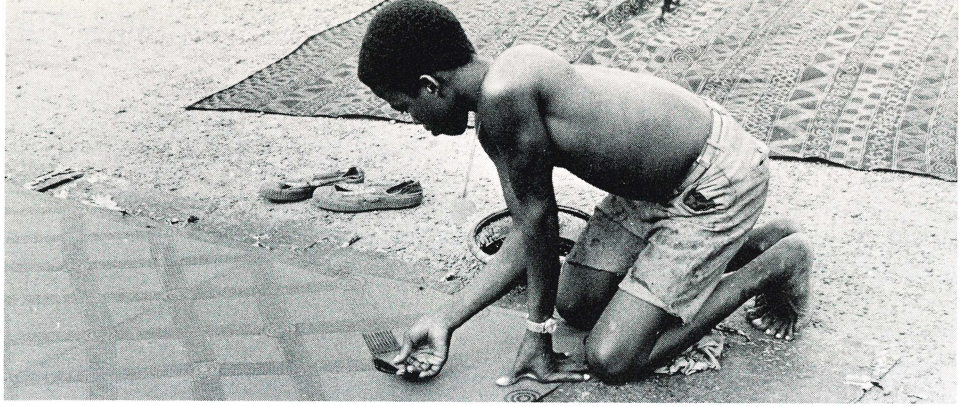




june 4

Today we started out for Tamale and Bolgatanga in the North—a bumpy, but quite beautiful trip through the ever-growing-dryer savannah, populated only by small monkeys, guinea fowl and parrots, and an occasional wild dog or two. The people call it "fire-land." It's about 110° in the shade. Nothing grows over six or seven feet tall. After feeling like a Lilliputian in the Techiman-Berekum country, I began to feel the giant!

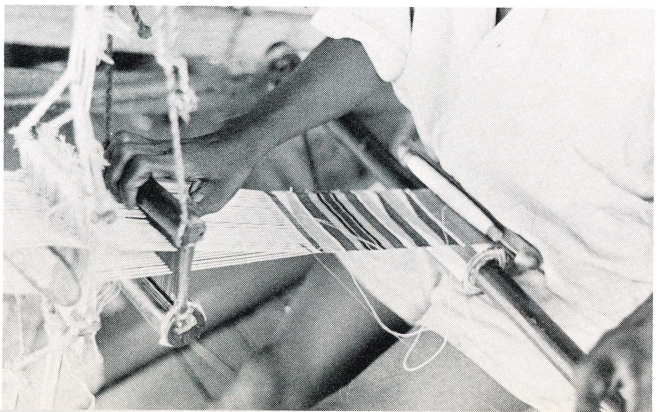
When villages again began to dot the landscape, they had changed entirely from the red clay rectangles of Brong-Ahafo to circular hut-type arrangements jointed with small retaining walls and with one main entrance, an oval door, sometimes decorated with crude stone and glass mossaics. The closer we got to Bolgatanga, the color and size of these compounds changed, becoming ever whiter and larger in the number of little clusters forming a village. The people changed as well. They are built larger on the whole, and more deeply pigmented in a beautiful blue-black hue. That pigmentation is about all they have for clothing here in the poorer North —not much display of colorful, plentiful cloth. They are poorly nourished as well—elongated facial structure, poor teeth, and wear a different hair style. Some yams and corn are their only staple foods. The rains have begun in the southern parts of Ghana, but not here, so the people will soon have to eat the seed for food and there will be a period of close starvation. From Bolgatanga to Navrongo, we crossed about five dry river beds and passed one dried-up dam. Men out tilling fields getting only the grey dust in their faces—the current greeting of the land. There is truly "hunger in so many eyes" here in the North. It has been good for me to make this trip. . . .

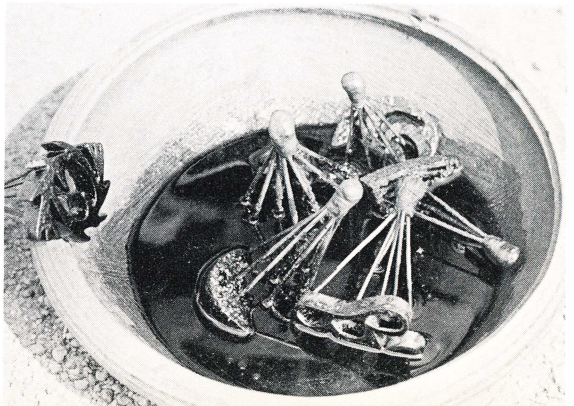


june 18

Here in Bonwire today to observe the famous kente weavers at work. The village chief is likewise the master weaver and most of the young boys are his apprentices. Boys come from all over, living in this village to learn the trade. It is a busy place with each loom working a different-named design. The air is filled with the characteristic sound of the loom "song." The traditional designs are all named for some occasion, national or local accomplishment, with, as always, some legend attached.

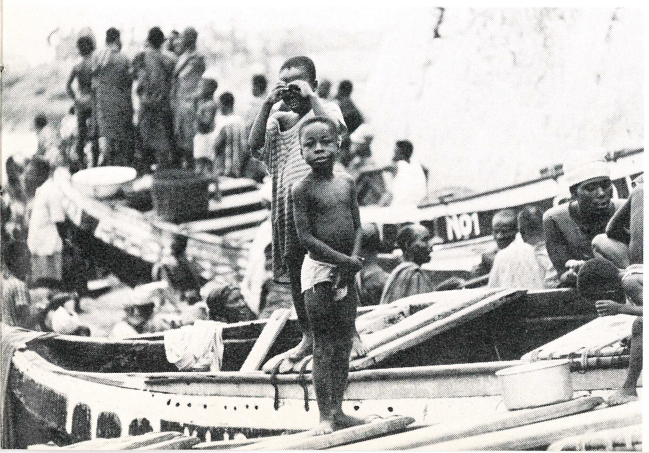
After lunch, we headed toward Ntonso where the traditional Adinkira or mourning cloths are stamped and joined with bright embroidery. The master had numerous young boys doing the actual stamping —intricate patterns with no preliminary design—spontaneous all the way! The cloth is tacked to the ground with small wooden spikes, then the stampers crawl all around the cloth working the total pattern —sometimes up to six stamps—in sections. They were ever so happy to show us their work, as they have a great sense of pride in it.





july 8

We were off to Elmina castle in the early morning after Mass at Cape Coast cathedral high on one of the many hills that form the city. Elmina is one of the main fishing towns. Everything there is built around the bay waterway, and all of the industry (net-making, boat-making) centers around this main source of livelihood. Before touring the castle, we walked the bay canal at one end to see the men winding the net coils into the boat bottoms and generally readying themselves and their crafts for a late-afternoon fishing voyage. We stopped to watch some young schoolboys taking off their khaki uniforms and enthusiastically throwing themselves into the white surf. Often they would completely disappear except for their faces framed in the foam. Dark polka dots on a white background. Beautiful!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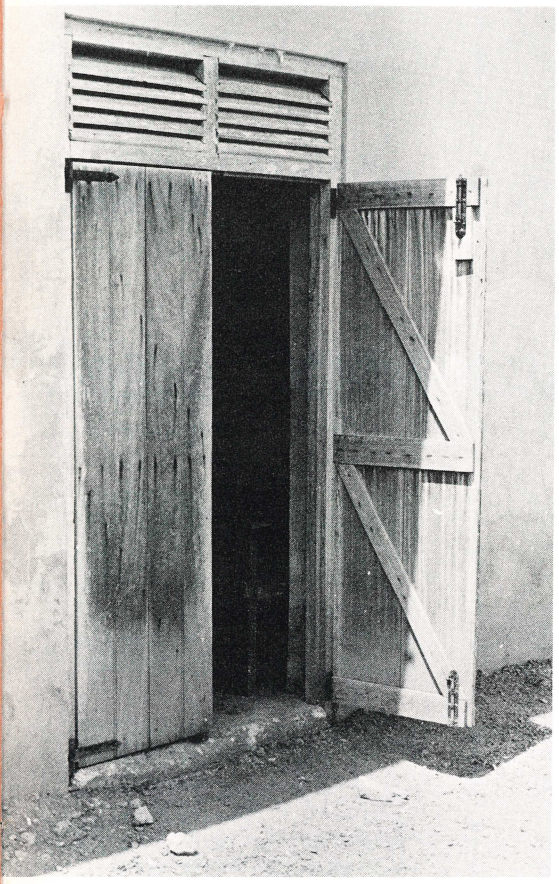
july 13

I've made a new friend here at Kokofu leprosarium —Beatrice Boatemah, 19 years old, who has been at Kokofu about a year. Like myself, she is an artist and that is what brought us together. Art supplies at Kokofu are limited, so I shared many of my supplies with her. She's a talented, sensitive girl, very open and concerned for her people. She asked me one day to tell her what I really thought about Ghana. I tried to be as honest as I could, telling her the things that I liked and the things that I did not like, adding that any dislikes that I had were due, not to the people themselves, but to my lack of understanding of their culture. She cried a bit and thanked me for being so frank with her. Then she said, "You do not speak like a white person anymore; you are black."

It struck me then that I had begun to learn something here in Ghana, that I had begun to see things less through my eyes, than through theirs. I had changed; I had grown. I was learning what it means to reach out to another culture, to understand it, to love it. Beatrice helped me to see that this was possible, was, in fact, happening to me. . . .



july 17

Ghana departure day—and reluctant, at that. Still, I leave this place with many new friends. It was delightful when Joseph, our driver, came to me just before we were to leave for Kotoka International Airport, Accra. He cleared his throat and delivered a lovely speech on how he would pray "often and hard" that God would send me back to Ghana to stay for a longer time. It was so dear, and I'm afraid I cried a bit. Later, I learned that he told one of the Sisters that we had "grown to be more than just faces, saying Joseph, take me here, take me there, but rather friends and fellow-travellers, showing one another many new things, and sharing what we knew, and helping each other to be bigger and better."

Was it really three-and-a-half months ago that I sat in Kennedy Airport watching all those anonymous fellow-travellers and wondering what we could possibly learn from one another? The Ghanaians were anonymous to me then too—just a crowd of people, claiming my notice, and nothing more. And now . . . now I know them, as a people and as persons. I know Joseph and Beatrice and Afia and George, and so many more. No longer nameless and anonymous. Now truly fellow-travellers and friends. I know Vicki a little better too, because of these new friends. And I am ready to travel again. . . .

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Sister Victoria Connelly

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NEWS CAPSULES

SOUTH AFRICA ■ The Medical Mission Sisters have opened a new house in Capetown in order to begin work among the Bantu peoples of southern Africa. ■ The community has accepted an invitation to do health education work in Zululand in the province of Natal, with a view to expanding the program to include public health and community development work. Preparations are underway to begin this work in January of 1971. ■ The Sisters have also accepted a request to contribute nursing service administration, bookkeeping services, and domestic service supervision of a 75-bed hospital in Stegi in the eastern part of Swaziland, about 40 miles from the Mozambique border. There are only four hospitals in the entire country. Eventually the Sisters hope to establish maternal-child health clinics and to organize the training of nurse-aides. They will begin work in Swaziland this coming July.

NIGERIA ■ Sister Ellen Castellini and Sister Paula D'Errico have applied for visas to Nigeria in order to do emergency medical relief work among the suffering.

UGANDA ■ Sixteen nurses graduated recently from the nursing school in Fort Portal. Eight of the graduates are already on the staff of several mission hospitals. The remaining eight will go into government service.

SOUTH INDIA ■ The new wing of the hospital was opened recently in Mundakayam.

CENTRAL AMERICA ■ Sister Margaret Ann Schmid is participating in the Central America Regional Pre-School Nutrition Program sponsored by Catholic Relief Services. The program aims to utilize the powdered milk and other foods supplied by USAID through CRS and other donated and locally available foods. It hopes to prevent malnutrition in children under school age through education of families, to treat cases of first and second degree malnutrition and to stimulate the formation of child-feeding centers under local auspices.

JORDAN ■ The Sisters will cease to staff Muashir Memorial Hospital in Amman in March.

MALAWI ■ 1969 marked the opening of the new nurses' school and hostel in Phalombe. There are 54 students presently enrolled in the training program. ■ New work has begun in Mwanga, a densely populated area with no medical facilities, located about 30 miles from Phalombe. An old corn grinding mill has been converted into a dispensary building. At present the hospital staff operates a weekly clinic, but the aim is to establish a maternity center and dispensary with three resident Sisters. Students from Phalombe take turns going to Mwanga, where they learn to work in circumstances different from a well-equipped hospital. ■ A nutritional rehabilitation center is in full swing in Kasina. African Sisters are trained for preventive work. African mothers are taught hygiene and food preparation by African nurses. By means of a demonstration garden, the mothers learn to grow vegetables with the help of an experienced gardener and have the satisfaction of feeding their offspring with the fruits of their hands.

NORTH INDIA ■ A new public health clinic was opened in the village of Burmu last fall. The clinic is an outreach of Holy Family Hospital, Mandar. ■ Sister-doctor Blanche Fernandes of Holy Family Hospital, New Delhi, organized and led a laboratory workshop at the National Catholic Hospital Convention in November. As a result, participants resolved to foster closer associations among technologists in India through an advisory board which would conduct workshops and be available for problem-solving, assistance and advice.

WEST PAKISTAN ■ Sister Rosina and a third-year nursing student have given over 3,000 vaccinations to date in the government-sponsored eradication of smallpox scheme.The project has taken them into an isolated area outside Rawalpindi where there is complete absence of medical and educational opportunities.

SOUTH VIETNAM ■ Ten lay volunteers from America, Australia, New Zealand and Ireland have joined six Medical Mission Sisters to staff and administrate Holy Family Hospital, Quinhon. There are currently 35 students enrolled in the school of nursing.

GHANA ■ The new maternity block at Holy Family Hospital, Techiman, is open. Nearly a year in preparation, it is the joint accomplishment of many people: the Sisters who planned it; the Ghanaian government which contributed finances through its Ministry of Health; USAID which gave building supplies; the Techiman Local Council and the Traditional Council which supplied both skilled and communal labor; and a number of individual Ghanaians who contributed to make the dream a reality.

PHILIPPINES ■ Two Sisters represented the community at the opening session of the Inter-Church Commission on Medical Care. Members of church-related medical institutions and representatives of government, WHO, and other medical associations met to discuss preliminary arrangements for the National Consultation on Health and Healing to be held this year.

INDONESIA ■ Suberlawang, a vast, heavily populated area north of Solo with no medical facilities, is today the object of a cooperative effort by the Coordinating Society for Medical Work of the Christian Churches in Middle Java and South Sumatra (JAKKUM), the Medical Mission Sisters, the government of Indonesia through its Department of Social Affairs, several universities and a rural training center. It is also a test case for further cooperation in the rural areas of Indonesia. Representatives met to outline the basis of cooperation: joint interest for the work that has to be done for people. The concept of man in this total environment is the unifying factor among the variety of disciplines, including Islam, that the joint effort represents. A survey is currently underway to investigate the medical, socio-economic and agricultural conditions of the area in order to evaluate what needs to be done. Two Medical Mission Sisters are involved full-time in the Suberlawang project: Sister Elly Verrijt who will work in the field of nutrition and agriculture (see WINTER issue, 1969) and Sister Lidwien Pragt, a nurse-midwife. Holy Family Hospital, Solo, has offered the services of its laboratory facilities. For the future, the hospital is projected as a medical center for both the Suberlawang area and the rural area around Solo.

BEST OF THE YEAR Award 1969 1970

For the second straight year, MEDICAL MISSIONARY has won a gold medal for excellence in design and craftsmanship in the annual Printing Week in Delaware Valley Graphic Arts competition.

TOP PRIORITY

At our hospital in Berekum the Medical Mission Sisters conduct the only nurses' and midwifery training schools in the Brong-Ahafo region—an area with a population of 588,700.

*The need is there, but we must train more African nurses. The school can now only accommodate 30 students. Every year some 1000 qualified women apply.

*Last year 102,017 patients were cared for by this hospital along with hundreds via our Mobile Health Safari Team.

The Ghana Government has requested us to make a vital contribution toward its health goals—to train Ghanaians as State Registered Nurses and midwives. The S.R.N. degree means these women will be qualified to train other Ghanaians.

It's a great opportunity and we're eager to get going. But before we can train, we must expand facilities: increase bed capacity, build classrooms and student accommodations.

	Total Cost	$338,337
	Raised	273,692
URGENT	NEEDED	$ 64,645 URGENT

We need your help to raise the remaining $64,645. Please use the coupon below. Our thanks and prayers are always with you.

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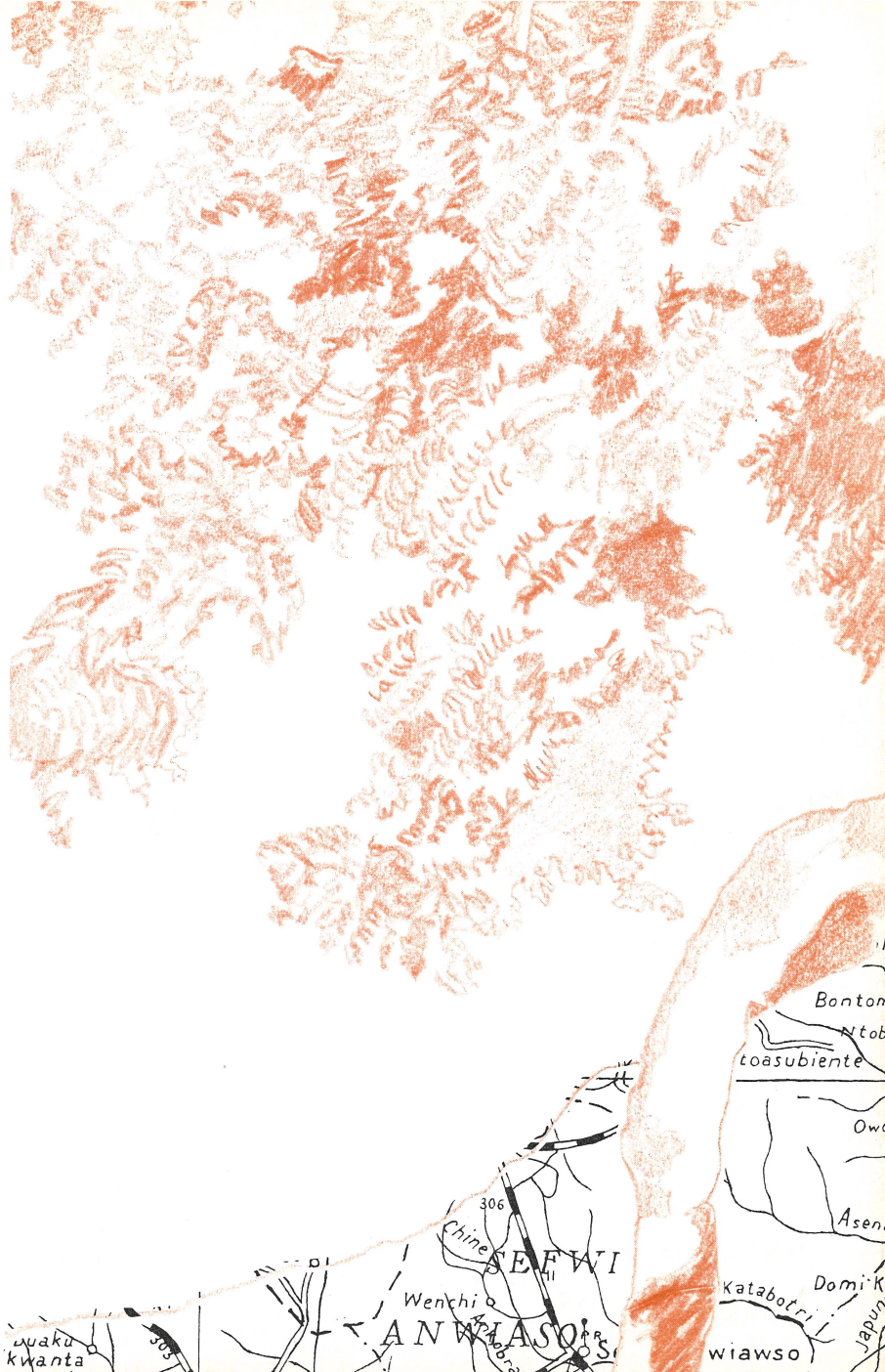
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Mundakayam, Kerala, India
Ithithanam, Kerala, India
Kottayam, Kerala, India
Berekum, Ghana, W. Africa
Techiman, Ghana, W. Africa
Kokofu, Ghana, W. Africa
Fort Portal, Uganda, E. Africa
Atat, Ethiopia, E. Africa
Nangina, Kenya, E. Africa
Phalombe, Malawi, Cent. Africa
Blantyre, Malawi, Cent. Africa
Kasina, Malawi, Cent. Africa
Inongo, Congo, Cent. Africa
Kiri, Congo, Cent. Africa
Pendzwa, Congo, Cent. Africa
Welkom, OFS, South Africa
Amman, Jordan
Quinhon, South Vietnam
Jakarta, Indonesia
Makassar, Sulawesi, Indonesia
Solo, Djawa, Indonesia
Pare-Pare, Sulawesi, Indonesia
Bongao, Sulu, Philippines
Lipa City, Philippines
Quezon City, Philippines
Imstenrade, Simpelveld, Holland
Utrecht, Holland
Rome, Italy
Osterley, England
Essen, Germany
Maracaibo, Venezuela
Atlanta, Georgia, USA
Santa Fe, New Mexico, USA
Washington, D.C., USA
St. Louis, Missouri, USA
Los Altos, California, USA
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA